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Security Council

Seventy-first year

Provisional

7641st meeting

Thursday, 3 March 2016, 10 a.m.

New York

President:	Mr. Gaspar Martins	(Angola)
Members:	China	Mr. Shen Bo
	Egypt	Mr. Mahmoud
	France	Mr. Delattre
	Japan	Mr. Yoshikawa
	Malaysia	Mr. Ibrahim
	New Zealand	Mr. Taula
	Russian Federation	Mr. Churkin
	Senegal	Mr. Barro
	Spain	Mr. García-Larrache
	Ukraine	Mr. Ilnytskyi
	United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland	Mr. Rycroft
	United States of America	Ms. Power
	Uruguay	Mr. Bermúdez
	Venezuela (Bolivarian Republic of)	Mr. Suárez Moreno

Agenda

The situation in the Middle East

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The meeting was called to order at 10.05 a.m.

Adoption of the agenda

The agenda was adopted.

The situation in the Middle East

The President: In accordance with rule 37 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite the representative of Yemen to participate in this meeting.

In accordance with rule 39 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite Mr. Stephen O'Brien, Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator, to participate in this meeting.

On behalf of the Council, I welcome Mr. O'Brien, who is joining today's meeting via video-teleconference from Brussels.

The Security Council will now begin its consideration of the item on its agenda.

I give the floor to Mr. O'Brien.

Mr. O'Brien: The conflict in Yemen continues unabated since my latest briefing (see S/PV.7622) to the Security Council, on 16 February. By far the most pressing concern today is the protection of civilians, millions of whom daily face relentless, and often indiscriminate, bombing and shelling of urban areas by the parties to the conflict. That was again made starkly clear on Saturday, 27 February, when approximately 30 people were killed and 40 injured in an apparent air strike on a busy market in the Nahem district of Sana'a governorate. Six children were among those killed in the attack. That was one of four air strikes in Nahem during February that reportedly killed civilians. More than 2,000 children are estimated to have been killed or injured since the start of the conflcit — including at least 90 children killed this year alone — by airstrikes, shelling, ground fighting and unexploded ordnance.

Protected places, such as hospitals, schools and homes, continue to be hit by all parties. On 24 February, coalition air strikes reportedly hit a health centre in Bidbadah district, Marib governorate, completely destroying the facility. On 1 March, airstrikes reportedly landed within 20 metres of a hospital in Sa'ada. I reiterate my previous calls: air strikes and random shelling of civilians and civilian areas violate cardinal rules of international humanitarian law and constitute unlawful conduct of hostilities. All parties to the conflict have an obligation under international humanitarian law to take every measure to ensure that civilians and civilian objects are protected. It is unacceptable that health facilities are being hit, and it is critical that the parties make guarantees that those locations will be protected.

In the absence of a political, negotiated end to the conflict, the security situation across much of the country is rapidly deteriorating. In Aden, regular attacks by parties — including Al-Qaida in the Arabian Peninsula, the so-called Aden and Abyan branch of the Islamic State and local militants — take place against security personnel and other segments of the Government of Yemen. Those attacks and the general lawlessness in Aden have prevented the United Nations from redeploying international staff there since October 2015, thereby directly impacting our ability to assess needs and monitor response. Intense fighting around Sana'a, Marib, Ta'izz and Sa'ada also restrict our ability to deliver assistance where it is needed most.

The proliferation of checkpoints across the country further impedes humanitarian action, slowing the transport of key goods and services and in some instances halting movement altogether. Command-and-control lines within armed groups are often tenuous, with agreements and guarantees reached at the national level not necessarily communicated downstream to the individuals at checkpoints. Despite permission to move, trucks are often held up and sometimes delayed for days or even weeks.

Bureaucratic requirements imposed by Houthi authorities also delay and impede the rapid delivery of humanitarian assistance. In one week alone in February, the Ministry of the Interior in Sana'a refused travel permission to three separate United Nations-led missions from Sana'a to Ibb and Ta'izz. Increasingly, the movement of United Nations security staff into and out of the country is also being made difficult, having a direct impact on our ability to expand operations. Of particular concern, however, is the fact that for over three months the World Food Programme (WFP), together with the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization and UNICEF, have been trying to conduct an emergency food security and nutrition assessment throughout the country. Originally intended to be launched in October 2015, the assessment continues to be blocked by authorities in Sana'a. This assessment is

critically needed in order to update information on food security and nutrition to inform humanitarian response.

Let me therefore remind all parties that providing timely and unimpeded access to humanitarian organizations is not only the fundamental prerequisite to any meaningful humanitarian response, but also an obligation under international humanitarian law. I call upon the Council to request all parties, in no uncertain terms, to stop any denial of access and facilitate life-saving needs immediately.

Despite these challenges, United Nations agencies and partners continue to deliver assistance, often at gave risk, across all sectors. In February, for example, over 3 million people received WFP food assistance — some 400,000 more than the month before. The humanitarian community remains committed to expanding its overall response to 13.4 million people this year in Yemen. To achieve this, the Yemen humanitarian response plan for 2016 appeals for $1.8 billion.

On 12 February, the Secretary-General instituted the United Nations Verification and Inspection Mechanism (UNVIM) at the request of the Government of Yemen. The Mechanism, based in Djibouti, is intended to expedite legitimate commercial imports of critical commodities such as food, fuel and medicines. All States and relevant organizations, including the International Maritime Organization, have since been notified of the Mechanism's procedures. The nominations for the UNVIM tripartite steering committee consisting of a representative of the Government of Yemen, the coalition and the United Nations will be finalized this week, allowing the full commencement of UNVIM operations.

In recent months there has been a significant increase of the delivery of fuel and other life-saving imports through Yemeni ports, and it is critical that every effort be made by all Member States directly concerned to encourage, and not hinder, that trend. It is imperative that imports to Yemen and trading within Yemen be allowed to continue. I call on all parties to ensure the protection of civilian infrastructure, including shipping ports and associated equipment.

I am also pleased to report that the WFP chartered vessel, the *Mainport Cedar*, which had been diverted and taken by the coalition to the Saudi port of Jizan, was released on 25 February. Humanitarian food and medical supplies were subsequently delivered, as planned, to Hudaydah. The humanitarian information technology equipment will be delivered to Aden on 6 March

Once again, I underscore the urgent need for the Council and the international community more broadly to impress upon the parties to the conflict their obligations to take greater measures to protect civilians and to facilitate unconditional and sustained access to all parts of Yemen. I also ask the Council to press the parties to resume peace talks and agree to a cessation of hostilities.

The President: I thank Mr. O'Brien for his briefing.

I give the floor to the representative of Yemen.

Mr. Alyemany (Yemen) (*spoke in Arabic*): Allow me at the outset to express my sincere thanks to all States members of the Security Council for their ongoing interest in Yemen and their close follow-up of the political settlement process and the humanitarian situation in my country. I also thank Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon for his acute attention to the Yemeni crisis, as maintained by his Special Envoy to my country, Mr. Ismail Ould Cheikh Ahmed, and his team. I further thank the international humanitarian community, represented by Mr. Stephen O'Brien.

We reiterate the readiness of the Yemeni Government to participate in talks with the putschist Houthis and Saleh at any time and anywhere in order to stem the bloodshed and achieve peace in Yemen. We demonstrated that readiness by attending the Basel talks in December 2015, where an agreement was reached on a number of points related to detainees, emergency assistance and other humanitarian issues. A venue was identified for new talks on 14 January, but the rebels blocked all efforts to that end and failed to meet their commitments with respect to confidence-building measures. They did not participate in the January consultations and are procrastinating in setting a new date.

We express our strong support for the Special Envoy and stress the importance of the international community's support for his efforts. That is the only path to peace in my country, in accordance with the Gulf initiative, the outcome of the National Dialogue Conference, resolution 2216 (2015) and the consultations endorsed in Basel in December.

Despite a significant improvement in the humanitarian situation in my country, particularly in the areas liberated from the putschist militias,

the humanitarian needs of my people remain vast, especially in regions under the control of the militias. The war imposed by the putschist militas, the Houthis and Saleh — which have plunged the country into utter chaos and destruction in order to achieve their cynical political objectives by force — have exacerbated humanitarian conditions that were already poor before the attempt to overthrow the Government. The Houthis and Saleh continue to target civilians and civilian neighbourhoods. Ta'izz governorate and its people continue to be systematically attacked. Katyusha rockets and artillery shells are aimed at civilian areas and innocent civilians. The militias have besieged the city for more than four months, targeting hospitals and medical infrastructure and preventing the delivery of the most basic emergency supplies, such as oxygen, food and water.

The situation is now on the verge of becoming a major health catastrophe. As the militias have closed in on the city over the past 10 months, more than 1 million people have been displaced to rural areas. And now, because of this continuing siege by the militias, the spectre of starvation has arisen in the rural areas hosting displaced people.

As we thank the organizations that have continued to work to reach those in need in Ta'izz, the Houthis continue to hamper the delivery of such assistance to the needy. The World Food Programme (WFP) has stated that it has been able to deliver food assistance to 3,000 families in Ta'izz, which represents approximately 18,000 people if we count six individuals per family. This is a very limited number when compared with the number of the actual needy — over 1.2 million people inside the besieged city alone. This number is escalating, particularly when we note the harsh humanitarian conditions in host communities resulting from the militia war. Furthermore, the WFP has stated that it has not been able to distribute any assistance in some areas of Ta'izz.

The putschist militias are acting like war criminals. They are using starvation as a weapon of war against my people in every province under their control. The Houthi militias continue to spread death everywhere. Antipersonnel mines have been planted around cities, on major roads and subsidiary roads, and this has slowed down the delivery of any humanitarian assistance to a number of regions.

The Houthi militias and the Saleh forces continue to detain humanitarian activists who have only been attempting to help their brethren in many cities. An example was the targeting of a tanker carrying water to Ibb governorate to aid those under siege in Ta'izz. Activists were detained and beaten. Sana'a is suffering terribly. The Houthis militias and the Saleh forces continue to loot assistance convoys going to Sana'a, Amran, Hajjah and Saada and are selling those goods on the black market.

This situation has only prolonged the suffering of our people. What is truly strange is that international organizations are reluctant to name those who are looting humanitarian assistance. We know that this is a widespread phenomenon; it is not limited. I would put the responsibility squarely on the shoulders of the international community because it has failed to condemn this blackmail and looting by the putschist militias that have stripped the Yemeni State of all its resources and are attempting to take us back to the dark ages with their sectarian discourse.

With the assistance of our brethren, notably the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, represented in the King Salman Centre for Humanitarian Aid, the Emirati and Qatari Red Crescent organizations, and many other humanitarian organizations from the Gulf acting in my country, we have attempted to return to a normal economic life with regular commercial activity. In early August 2015, the Yemeni Government agreed with the United Nations and alliance forces to set up the United Nations Verification and Inspection Mechanism (UNVIM) and operationalize it. On 24 February, the Government of Yemen appointed its representative to the steering committee of UNVIM, and we stated our position on the location of the headquarters of UNVIM. The Government had agreed with the United Nations that the headquarters would be in the city of Aden, following its liberation from the Houthi forces. Previously, there had been an agreement for UNVIM to be based in Jeddah, in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. We were therefore very surprised when the headquarters were moved to Djibouti without even consulting the Yemeni Government. We strongly objected to that because it breached our agreement with the United Nations.

The putschist forces continue to target our children, the rights of our children and future generations in Yemen. More and more children are being recruited to Houthi militias. This threatens future generations in

areas still under the control of the putschist militias. The recruitment of children and the brainwashing of children with religious and sectarian extremist ideologies are a time bomb. The Security Council must act to defuse it in due time through implementing relevant United Nations resolutions which have clearly addressed this issue.

Before concluding, I would express the wish that the Security Council will continue consulting with the Yemeni Government and its Permanent Mission here in New York on any negotiations or consultations on any Security Council output on the humanitarian situation in Yemen. We wish such outputs to echo the screams of our children, our suffering, including Fareed Shawky, who is dying in Ta'izz under siege. I would ask the Council to kindly say to those Houthi killers and the Saleh forces to stop killing the dreams of my people and free them to build a democratic State.

The President: I now invite Council members to informal consultations to continue our discussions on the subject.

The meeting rose at 10.25 a.m.